



Reducing Conflicts Between Dogs and Wolves in Idaho

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This brochure is intended to provide dog owners with information that may help them avoid or reduce the likelihood of conflicts with wolves, and circumstances under which dog owners may kill a wolf attacking their dog. It's impossible to completely eliminate the risk of wolf-dog conflicts in wolf habitat, but dog owners can take several precautions when walking dogs or hunting with hounds.

Hunting with hounds:

- Hound hunting in wolf habitat is inherently risky because trailing dogs run loose away from the people who would ordinarily deter wolves. But houndsmen can



photo by Jason Hansen



photo by Steve Madson

take steps to reduce the risk of hound-wolf conflicts.

Researchers investigating mountain lion ecology in Yellowstone National Park used hounds to capture lions in the park over eight winters. Over the course of 150-plus lion captures in an area with some of the highest densities of wolves, they did not have a single conflict

with wolves. Researchers and managers suggest the following to minimize hound-wolf interactions:

- Survey an area for wolf sign prior to releasing dogs; don't turn hounds loose if fresh wolf sign is found or wolves are heard howling nearby.
- Release hounds only on fresh sign – shorter chases result in less time dogs are away from the safety of people.
- Yell or make noise when releasing hounds and going to the tree to announce your presence to wolves that may be in the area.
- Get to the tree as quickly as possible – barking, unattended dogs may attract wolves.
- Leash dogs at the tree to prevent them from splitting and pursuing other cats.
- Some have suggested the use of bells or beeper collars to emit a non-natural sound that indicates the hounds are not wild canines.
- Avoid releasing dogs at baits or kill sites recently visited by wolves. When looking for bear or lion sign at a bait or carcass, make sure to also look for wolf tracks.
- Bird hunters working in timbered wolf habitat for forest grouse can reduce chance of conflict: keep dogs within view, place a bell or beeping collar on wider ranging dogs, talk loudly to the dog or other hunters, use

whistles. Control the dog so it stays close to the hunter and wolves nearby would associate the dog with a human. Place the dog on a leash if wolves or fresh sign are seen.



Bells placed on hunting dogs may reduce the likelihood of encounters with wolves.

When walking dogs:

- Keep dogs on a leash when walking in wolf habitat if possible – dogs running loose, away from people may attract wolves.
- If dog runs loose, bring a leash to restrain the dog if wolves or wolf sign are encountered.
- Be able to recognize wolf sign. Wolves are particularly territorial around den and rendezvous sites and kills; knowing how to recognize the signs associated with these areas will help avoid them.
- People who live near wolves should kennel their dogs or bring them in at night. Wolves are most active during the evening and early morning, and most conflicts with domestic dogs occur at this time. Also, don't leave food out that may attract wolves, bears or other unwelcome guests.
- Make noise or place a bell on the dog collar to alert wolves that humans are associated with the dog. Wolves are more likely to avoid contact with a dog when they are aware of humans nearby.

What the law allows dog owners to do to protect their dogs:

- Wolves in Idaho are listed under the Endangered Species Act. South of Interstate 90 are protected under section 10(j) of the act. On February 7, 2008, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service amended the “10(j)” rule, making it more flexible for livestock operators, dog owners and wildlife managers. The rule provides some options to states and tribes with approved wolf management plans to manage wolves that are affecting wild elk and deer herds and to protect private property. The rule also allows individuals legally present on private or public land to kill a wolf that is in the act of attacking their stock animals (horse, mule, donkey, llama or goat used to transport people or possessions) or dogs, except land north of Interstate 90 in Idaho, or land administered by the National Park Service, and provided there is no evidence of intentional baiting, feeding or deliberate attractants of wolves.
- Killing a wolf must be reported within 24 hours and the injured or dead livestock or dog and any other evidence must be evident to verify that a wolf attack was imminent. Where confirmed wolf depredations of livestock or dogs on private land or grazing allotments have occurred, and are likely to occur again based on the continued presence of wolves, the private landowner or grazing allotment permittee may be issued a “shoot-on-sight” permit. But it is legal only for the land owner, outfitter or permittee to shoot wolves that harass or attack dogs on private land or grazing allotments. Wolves may be harassed nonlethally at any time.

Why wolves and dogs have conflicts:

- Wolves are by nature extremely territorial and guard their territory and recent kills from other canines, including coyotes and domestic dogs. They have developed ritualistic behaviors such as scent marking and howling to mark their boundaries and indicate their strength to neighboring packs. Territorial behavior stems from their need to maintain a sufficient food supply and decrease competition from other meat eaters. Because humans and their pets don't typically understand or recognize the complex system of wolf sound sign, and smell, they may place their pets in harm's way without realizing it.



Keeping hounds leashed until a fresh track is found will reduce the length of the chase and decrease the likelihood of dog-wolf encounters.

Wolf biology and behavior:

- Wolves are highly social animals, and the family structure is focused around the pack. Packs typically consist of a breeding pair – the alpha male and alpha female – and their young from previous years. Pack size doesn't vary much between years because the wolves that either leave or die each year are replaced by newborn pups.
- Wolves breed in late winter, and subsequently give birth to an average of four to five pups in April. The pups are born in a den dug by the breeding female, around which the pack localizes. Wolf pups spend their first six to eight weeks at the den, and are weaned at around six weeks of age. Once they begin eating meat, the pups are fed by adult members of the pack, which carry partly digested meat back from kills to regurgitate for the young.
- As the pups become older, the pack typically moves them from the den to “rendezvous sites,” which are usually wet meadow areas within a pack's territory, where the adults can leave the pups while they go off to hunt. Wolves may use several rendezvous sites during the summer months until the pups are big and strong enough to travel full time with the pack, generally by late September or October.
- But because they typically spend several weeks at rendezvous sites they are generally easily identified by the following sign:
 - Numerous tracks and scat, both adult and pup.
 - Bones brought back from kills.
 - Matted grass near streams or in meadows with timbered cover nearby.
 - Well worn trails and bed sites in grass.
 - Howling of adults and pups – pups sound “yippy” or coyote-like.

Identifying wolf sign:

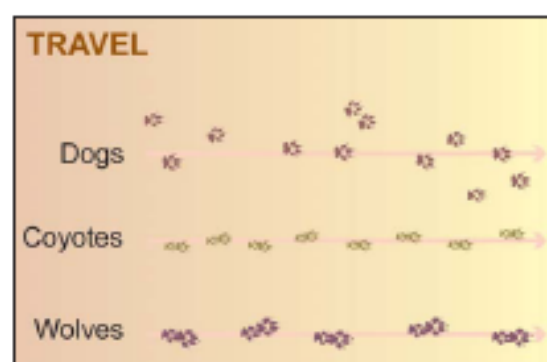
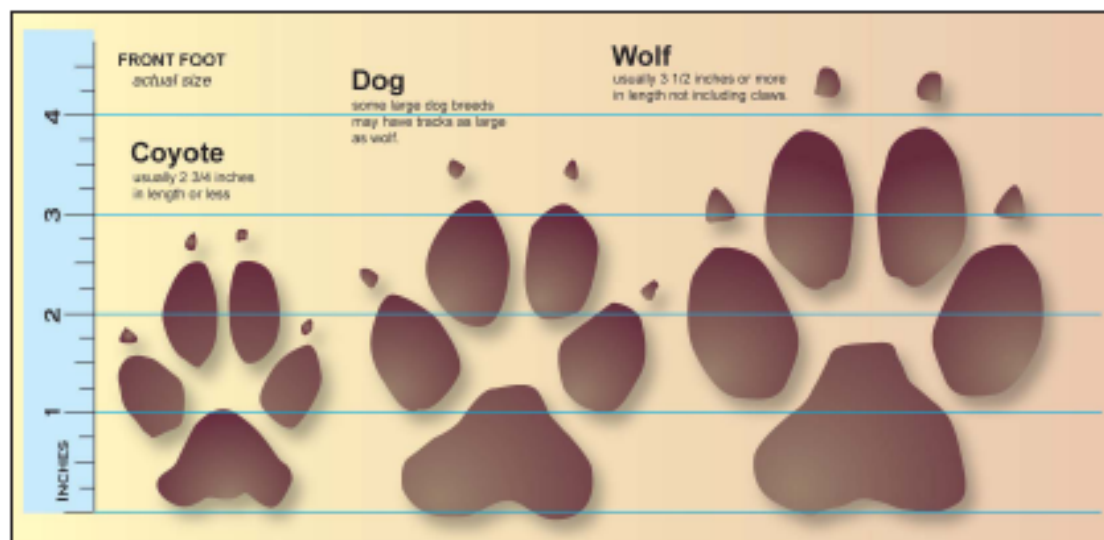
- Because wolves tend to travel the same trails that people do, wolf sign can often be found if wolves are nearby. The following will help distinguish wolf sign from other animal sign:

- **Scat:** Wolf droppings or “scat” can be distinguished from other “canid” scat based on size and content. Wolf scat is generally 1 to 1 1/2 inches in diameter with tapered ends. In contrast, coyote scat is much smaller, typically less than 1 inch in diameter. Wolf scat usually contains elk and deer hair, as well as shards of bones. Wolf “meat scats” are typically deposited after a fresh kill and are loose and tar-like in consistency.
- **Travel and tracks:** Wolf tracks are generally much larger than dog tracks usually 3 1/2 to 4 inches wide by 4 to 5 inches long and with distinct claw marks. When wolves are traveling, they usually are more “business like” than a dog and travel in a straight line, while a dog will meander. The distance between one set of wolf tracks and the next set is usually greater than 26 inches and likely more than 30. Also, wolves tend to have narrow chests, thus their tracks appear almost in a straight line. Mountain lion tracks in comparison will usually not have any claw marks, and tracks will appear rounder. Their stride is usually shorter than 26 inches, and because they have broader chests, their tracks will not appear in a straight line. When a pack of wolves are traveling together in the snow, they will often walk directly in each others tracks so that there appears to be only one animal.

If you have a wolf-dog conflict or see a wolf:

- If your dog is injured or killed by wolves, report the incident as soon as possible to your local Fish and Game Officer or Regional Office, or to USDA Wildlife Services. If you kill a wolf attacking your dog, mark the location and protect the evidence of the attack as best you can, and you must report it within 24 hours to:
 - **To report legal wolf take and wolf- dog interactions, :**
 - Idaho Fish and Game regional offices at this link.
 - **USDA Wildlife Services:** 1-866-487-3297

Idaho Fish and Game needs your help in documenting areas of wolf activity to accurately estimate the number of wolf packs in the state. Please report any sightings of wolves or wolf sign to <http://fishandgame.idaho.gov/wildlife/wolves/report.cfm>. And visit our wolf webpage at <http://fishandgame.idaho.gov/wildlife/wolves/>.



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